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SUBJECT: BULGARIAN ENGINEERS TO IRAQ DELAYED UNTIL NEW UNSCR

Classified By: DCM Karagiannis for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (S) SUMMARY. Deputy Defense Minister Yankulova informed DCM Karagiannis that approval for the deployment of 40 military engineers to Iraq is contingent on passage of a new UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) on Iraq. Yankulova cited this as the "formal" reason approval of the deployment was stalled, hinting at behind-the-scenes political or budgetary obstacles "at a level higher than the Defense Minister". We pushed back that the Ministry should tee up mechanics and political decision making within the Council of Ministers for the speediest possible approval. On Afghanistan, Yankulova said she had approved two proposals for troop increases and forwarded them for the Defense Minister's signature. The first is a 20 soldier increase to Bulgaria's current mission guarding the perimeter at Kandahar Airfield, and the second is a new 50 soldier deployment that would allow Bulgaria to take over the Entry Control Point (ECP) mission at the same location. She said she was almost certain the Minister would sign the first of these, but "could not be sure" whether he would sign the second (again hinting at political and budget factors). We argued for timely, positive action. The Ambassador is engaging directly with DefMin Bliznakov to accelerate action. END SUMMARY.

IRAQ

12. (C) In response to Yankulova's brief on potential delays to the engineering deployment, the DCM emphasized that this issue must move forward quickly and requested the Ministry take all possible steps to prepare the bureaucratic procedures for the speediest possible approval. He explained that waiting for a new UNSCR on Iraq would create significant operational problems for the commanders in the field who were working to accommodate the necessary transportation and sustainment requirements of the Bulgarian contingent. Since a new UNSCR was widely seen as inevitable, he argued it should not be necessary to wait for its formal completion to begin the often lengthy interministerial approval process. Yankulova said that she understood, but at the moment, the Bulgarian position is that a new resolution is required before the Ministry of Defense can even propose the deployment for consideration by the Council of Ministers. Following the Council's approval, she explained, it will also have to be approved by the Parliament.

13. (C) Even with a new UNSCR, Yankulova stated that she could not guarantee that a political decision will be made to approve the engineers. The DCM probed whether it was an issue of money and emphasized that the United States has

offered to cover secure transportation, logistics, training and sustainment of the contingent. Yankulova did not answer directly, but did say that despite U.S. assistance, finances were still an issue, since personnel costs, particularly combat bonuses, for deployed soldiers had to be budgeted in advance and must come at the expense of other items in the defense budget. She mentioned that the defense budget was set to shrink from approximately 2.5 percent GDP to 2.1 percent and that certain domestic constituencies were opposed to spending more money on overseas deployments. The DCM encouraged the Deputy Minister to push the process along, pre-position decision papers and complete logistics and other planning, since timeliness is critical.

#### AFGHANISTAN

14. (C) Yankulova stated that the Defense Minister was almost certain to sign a proposal for an additional 20 soldiers to reinforce an existing Bulgarian contingent manning the perimeter of Kandahar Airfield. This increase, she said, was proposed by the Ministry of Defense (following President Parvanov's visit to the Bulgarian contingent earlier this month) in order to relieve the current forces who are overstretched. She said she had moved forward a second proposal calling for an additional 50 soldiers to take over the Entry Control Point mission at the same location, but she was less certain whether Defense Minister Bliznakov would sign. Both of these troop increases would require Council of Ministers approval, but because they are part of a NATO mission, they would not require parliamentary approval.

15. (S) COMMENT: Yankulova seemed worn down by contentious budget battles that have reduced the defense budget to 2.1

percent of GDP. While we do not believe that Bulgaria's basic commitment to engagement in Iraq and Afghanistan has changed, concerns over the declining defense budget and the bureaucratic wrangling over military reform and procurements has distracted the attention of senior officials and slowed the decision-making process. While Yankulova is supportive of U.S. policies and remains an ally within the Ministry, her position is complicated by the uncertain political future of Defense Minister Bliznakov, who is rumored to be among those to be sacked in the event of an early cabinet reshuffle. We are pushing the Bulgarians to move these issues forward faster, engaging directly with the Defense Minister and the offices of the President and Prime Minister to secure a speedy, positive outcome. END COMMENT.  
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